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FOREIGN DEPARTMENT

IN CHARGE OF

LAVINIA L. DOCK, R.N.

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST VENEREAL DISEASE

When the Congress of Nurses met in London, 1909, they took precedence of medical men in that country in declaring war on venereal diseases. In that year we were told of a medical woman in England whose wish to present a paper on this line before a medical society had been refused. But now this is changed, and the following letter, signed by thirty-eight leading practitioners, has been published in the English press:

SIR: The increase in medical knowledge during the last sixty years has been extremely rapid, and the control of health problems by the state and municipalities has become one of the most striking features of modern civilization. The state has compelled local authorities to build asylums for the insane; it has encouraged them to make provision for the segregation of cases in infectious fevers; it has insisted on the notification of many infectious diseases; it has undertaken the inspection of children on a colossal scale; it has introduced an elaborate machinery to ensure the purity of foods, and it is steadily at work laboriously building up a vast system of public health legislation. Today we are all looking forward to what may be the effects of the campaign against tuberculosis, and the community has cause to congratulate itself on the organized national effort that it is about to make to eliminate the disease.

In all this organized effort there is one noteworthy omission. There has always been a conspiracy of silence as regards venereal diseases. The time, however, has come when it is a national duty to face the facts and to bring them prominently to the notice of the public. When the subject was discussed last year at the Royal Society of Medicine it was stated without contradiction that in London alone there are 40,000 new cases of the gravest form of the disease every year, and in the United Kingdom as a whole 130,000 such cases. The worst form of venereal disease is highly contagious and dire in its effects. It claims its victims not only from those who have themselves to blame for contracting it. It is one of those diseases that may be transmitted from parent to child, so that the offspring of a sufferer is born with the virus actually in its tissues, to cause, it may be, hideous deformity, or blindness, or deafness, or idiocy, ending often in premature though not untimely death. Innocent members of the public, wives, children, doctors, dentists, students and nurses are among those who during the routine of their ordinary life are often accidentally called upon to pay a tragic penalty for the wilful blindness that ignores its existence. There is a great volume of evidence that locomotor ataxia and general paralysis are its belated manifestations.

We are living today in a new era as regards diagnosis and treatment. The microbes responsible for these diseases have been discovered in recent years. Means of diagnosis far in advance of previous experience have been elaborated, and treatment has been enormously improved. The time is, therefore, appropriate for an organized effort on a comprehensive scale to reduce the incidence of these diseases. The experience of the Royal Army Medical Corps during the last few years has shown the enormous reduction in all forms of the disease that can be brought about as a result of systematic effort.

Organized effort among the civilian population is impracticable until the public conscience has been aroused, and can only be attempted after a full and authoritative investigation. We appeal, therefore, to the public through your columns to demand the appointment of a royal commission—its members to include a substantial majority of medical men—to investigate the facts and to recommend what steps, prophylactic and therapeutic, should be taken to cope with these diseases.—Yours, etc.

The International Medical Congress, which has just met in London passed these resolutions:

That, sensible of the ravages wrought by syphilis in the health of the community and deploring the inadequacy of existing facilities for checking its dissemination, the International Medical Congress calls upon the governments of all the countries here represented—

1. To institute a system of confidential notification of the disease to a sanitary authority, wherever such notification does not already obtain.
2. To make systematic provision for the diagnosis and treatment of all cases of syphilis not otherwise provided for.

ITEMS

The *British Journal of Nursing* says:

The large majority of the London dailies ignored the resolutions passed in the public's interest at the recent annual meeting of the Society for the State Registration of Nurses. This is not strange when we realize that several of the proprietors of these publications are responsible as governors of hospitals for the abuses to which the resolutions referred. But in spite of their boycott wide publicity has been given to the nurses' protests, through the *British Medical Journal*, a large number of non-partisan papers, and the Women's Press.